

Your Special Sauce

Branding your way to better margins

FOR MANY CUSTOM JEWELERS, THE least favorite part of creating custom jewelry is discussing the price. For reasons I don't understand, some customers believe that having a jeweler make something in the shop is supposed to cost less than reselling jewelry from another company. The last time I checked, the ultimate definition of luxury is something that is available in very limited quantities and is personalized for the buyer.

So I ask: What is the point of making a luxury object and not receiving a luxury price for it?

I spend a lot of time working and talking with custom jewelers, and one of the things I have come to realize is how

rarely they see themselves as purveyors of luxury. Bench jewelers tend to see themselves as people who make things, with ragged fingernails, wearing an apron, and sitting at a bench full of tools. We get so wrapped up in our view of ourselves that we do not see how other people see us.

Here's what the right consumer sees: An artist who can create things that other people cannot. A magician who can take raw materials and turn them into beautiful, wearable objects. Just knowing you is an experience; watching you work is a privilege.

The other customer is the one who lacks appreciation for skill, and who thinks that adding up the price of gold

and gemstones plus a little time for labor is the sum of a piece of jewelry. Send this customer, the one who asks, "How much will it cost?" toward the beginning of the conversation, to Walmart or Costco. Then start looking for the right customer and you'll find that every price negotiation from that point forward is easier.

DEFINE YOUR BRAND

No business needs all the customers. You just need the right customers. This is the beating heart of branding.

Think about this jingle: "*Two all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions on a sesame-seed bun.*"

It only works for people who love a traditional hamburger. Vegans, vegetarians, people who prefer chicken, and people who can't stand pickles or onions are not the target of this message. But McDonald's didn't care. It was targeting burger lovers, and it knew that there were enough people for whom this message would work, so it wasn't worried about the ones for whom it would not. McDonald's makes its financial bet on keeping its core audience happy, and this discipline has sustained the brand for decades.

This is the work you must do. You must figure out which customers are the right customers for your brand. When you do that, you mitigate negotiations before they ever begin. How do you do this?

You start by determining what your



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brand is all about. To do this, answer these three questions:

1. Who are we?
2. What do we do that makes us different?
3. Why do we matter?

Answering these questions will help you define both your differentiation and your competitive advantage. Once you understand these things yourself, you can help your customers and potential customers understand them too. The next step is to find the right customers.

I have a little secret for you. While you must always be looking for the right customers, your life will be much easier if you also attract the right customers to you. After all—hunting is hard work. Having a percentage of the right customers simply show up on your doorstep can be a real boon. The way you do that is with messaging and branding.

Once you know the answers to the three questions above, you can turn them into a simple branding statement. Here are a few generic examples:

A. “We are custom jewelry designers. We don’t sell anything we don’t make, and we have earned a reputation for designing and making stunning jewelry.”

B. “We are a full-service jeweler that can make, fix, remake, or reinvent any piece of jewelry into something you will treasure forever.”

Once you create your message, be sure to include it in everything you do. How and where you advertise, your website content and experience, how you manage your store or workshop, even how you and your employees present yourselves are all

part of that message.

Every element of your business must be consistent. For example, if a customer walks into a business based on Message A, and sees a bunch of estate jewelry and generic, other-brand jewelry, the message that attracted them would feel like a lie. The message lands the customer on the doorstep, but inconsistency causes the customer to walk away.

But imagine that a customer has been exposed to Message B. She’s interested in this message, so she visits the store. There, she sees an engaging display that shows her the elements of a piece of jewelry, displayed as components. She sees another display that explains the differ-

ence between types of gold or a few jewelers’ tools. She peers into the next room and sees a glorious jeweler’s workbench in use. The message that had attracted her in the first place is reinforced everywhere she looks. She decides to stay.

The primary purpose of branding is to draw the right consumers to your business. The right consumers are interested in something inherent to your message, and price takes a backseat to that interest. This is how you reduce the amount of pressure you feel on pricing, and focus your energy on what makes you special. The true secret to earning better margins is branding, and any business, no matter how small, can do this. ♦



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